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ABSTRACT

A study surveyed current presentation skills training practices of "Fortune 500" industrial companies. Each company's chief executive officer was sent a cover letter explaining the study and a copy of the survey. Data were obtained from 154 respondents (for a 36% response rate). Results indicated the importance of presentation skills to job performance, and a majority of the companies (82%) provide some kind of presentation skills training. Findings suggest that most training courses are short, specific, and drill oriented, and that they are evaluated in some way at the conclusion of the training. (Seventeen tables of data are included.) (KEH)

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Survey Report of

Presentation Skills Training

In *Fortune 500* Industrial Companies

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Executive Summary

Research studies over the past 50 years have overwhelmingly concluded that most businesses want and need employees with strong presentation skills. Unfortunately, very few studies during this same period--and no study since 1969--have tried to find out what businesses do in the way of providing presentation skills training. Because so little is known about such an important area, a survey was undertaken to determine current presentation skills training practices of *Fortune 500* industrial companies.

Each company's CEO was sent a cover letter explaining the study and a copy of the survey. One month after this first mailing, a second cover letter and survey were sent to the nonrespondents (N=400). A total of 180 surveys were received for a response rate of 36% (154 completed surveys; 26 declined to participate).

Importance of Presentation Skills to Job Performance

Presentation skills rank "very important" for the sales staff, executives, middle managers, and human resource staff; rank "important" for the supervisors and technical staff; and rank between "somewhat important" and "not important" for the secretarial staff and hourly wage workers. Further statistical tests showed that there is strong agreement between the responses.

On one level, the results are not surprising. Some company positions (sales staff, executives, middle managers, and human resource staff) need presentation skills more than others. After all, employees in these positions are more likely to make presentations.

On another level, the results somewhat contradict earlier research reports. If presentation skills are important to a company's success, why shouldn't the skills be important for all levels of employees? One explanation may be that earlier studies did not attempt a comparison of the importance of the skill and the level of employee.

Description of Training Practices

A majority of the companies (82%) provide some kind of presentation skills training. This is a much higher number than current national estimates (36%)[1] and suggests that many of the top 500 companies think that presentation skills play an important part in their success. This conclusion gains even more support when examining the three main reasons why this training was implemented: 1) to increase employee performance, 2) employees wanted it, and 3) it's part of employees' general training.

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[1]Lee, C. (October, 1987). Where the training dollars go. *Training, 24*(10), 51-65.

Who performs the training? For the highest levels of employees (executives and middle managers), outside consultants usually provide the training. For all others, the most likely source is the in-house staff, although vendor companies are a close second.

Finally, more training is provided for the higher level employees, while relatively little training is provided for the hourly wage workers. These results correspond directly with the "perceived importance" of presentation skills for each level of employee. Essentially, the more important the skills are for an employee's performance, the more likely that employee is to receive training.

Analysis of In-House Training Efforts

Although training comes from several sources, 73% of the companies provide training that is delivered by in-house staffs. The average class size is 13 employees, the average length of the training is 7 hours for 3 days, and the course is offered about 9 times per year.

As far as the content of the training is concerned, the training usually focuses on organization techniques, use of visual aids, physical delivery, handling speaking fear, vocal delivery, handling questions, and gaining audience attention. The most popular training aids are videotape, lectures, group participation exercises, material developed in-house, and structured discussions.

These findings suggest that most of the courses are short, specific, and drill oriented (use actual speaking practice). They seem to vary from the standard university course in length of training, depth of the material, and amount of practice devoted to delivering presentations.

Evaluation Attempts of In-House Training Programs

Of the in-house programs, 89% are evaluated in some way, usually at the conclusion of the training. The type of evaluation conducted is most frequently that of "reaction" or "how well the participants liked the program." More detailed evaluations, such as "results" or "how the program reduced costs, improved quality, or improved quantity," are attempted much less frequently.

Who sees the reports of the evaluations? Usually the training directors and presentation skills trainers. How are the evaluations used? To change the program.

These results, on one hand, are encouraging. Literature over the past 10 years has asserted that few programs are evaluated. Obviously, this isn't the case in this study. On the other hand, the type of evaluation conducted is still relatively "low level." Strong attempts to show that the programs are having a positive dollar impact are still lacking. The implication: when you can't prove that you are making or saving money, it is much easier for your program to be terminated.

Definitions

- **Base:** This is the number used to calculate the percent of each response for each question. It is actually the number of companies that responded (or should have responded) to each question.
- **Human Resource Staff:** Personnel, public relations, and training and development employees.
- **Mean:** This is the average score of a question. A mean is calculated by taking the total value for all responses to a question and dividing that value by the total number of companies who responded to that question.
- **Percent:** This is determined by taking the number of companies who responded in a similar way (frequency) and dividing that number by the total number of companies who responded to that question (Base).
- **Presentation Skills:** Skills used by a person who (usually) informing, persuading, or entertaining a group of listeners.
- **Presentation Skills Training:** Any organized attempt to improve presentational speaking ability, with or without presentation aids. For example, training that is provided in-house, through vendor companies, or by other means are all considered presentation skills training.
- **Standard Deviation (SD):** This indicator tells you how close the respondents in the sample are to the mean. The smaller the number, the closer the entire population is to the mean. In general, one standard deviation from the mean (that can be positive or negative) contains 68% of the population. So, if the mean is 2 and the standard deviation is 1, then 68% of the population is between 1 and 3.
- **Technical Staff:** Engineer and chemist employees.
- **Trainer:** The person, teacher, or individual who delivers the presentation skills training program(s).
- **Types of Employees:** This is a term that describes eight different categories of company employees: executives, middle managers, supervisors, human resource staff, sales staff, secretarial staff, technical staff, and hourly wage workers.

Demographics of the Respondents

Distribution of the Responses Compared to Fortune 500 Rank

001 to 050:	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
051 to 100:	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
101 to 150:	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
151 to 200:	XXXXXXXXXXXXXX
201 to 250:	XXXXXXXXXXXXX
251 to 300:	XXXXXXXXXXXXXX
301 to 350:	XXXXXXXXXXXXXX
351 to 400:	XXXXXXXXXX
401 to 450:	XXXXXXXXXX
451 to 500:	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Base: 154

Reasons for Not Responding to the Study

No reason given	50%
Too many requests to answer all of them	42%
Information top secret	04%
Information already at other published sources	04%

Base: 26

Importance of Presentation Skills to Job Performance

Not Important (1)
Somewhat Important (2)
Important (3)
Very Important (4)

	N	S	I	V	Mean	SD
Sales Staff	01%	01%	10%	88%	**3.8**	.49
Executives	01%	01%	13%	85%	**3.8**	.44
Middle Managers	01%	02%	34%	63%	**3.6**	.57
Human Resource Staff	01%	04%	37%	58%	**3.5**	.61
Supervisors	01%	22%	56%	21%	**3.0**	.70
Technical Staff	05%	32%	50%	13%	**2.7**	.70
Secretarial Staff	35%	52%	11%	02%	**1.8**	.70
Hourly Wage Workers	65%	29%	06%	00%	**1.4**	.62

Base: 154

82% of the companies that completed a survey said that they provide presentation skills training.

Companies that *Do Not* Provide Training

Past and Future Trends*

Previously provided training	43%
Plan to provide training within one year	14%

Reasons for Not Having a Training Program*

Other programs cover similar material	50%
Training of this type is unimportant	18%
Programs of this type are not effective	11%
Upper management does not believe in it	11%
Programs cost too much	07%

Base: 28

****Adds to more than 100% due to multiple answers.***

Companies that *Do* Provide Training

Reasons for Implementing Training Programs*

To increase employee performance	90%
Employees wanted it	60%
Part of employee general training	54%
Needed training for speaker's bureau	05%

Source of Presentation Skills Training*

	In-House Staff	Vendor Company	Outside Consultant	University
Executives	21%	26%	74%	08%
Middle Managers	45%	37%	47%	09%
Supervisors	60%	25%	19%	06%
Human Resource Staff	48%	32%	35%	10%
Sales Staff	51%	34%	34%	05%
Secretarial Staff	38%	10%	04%	00%
Technical Staff	50%	17%	17%	04%
Hourly Wage Workers	29%	03%	02%	02%

Base: 126

****Adds to more than 100% due to multiple answers.***

1st and 2nd Most Likely Sources of Training

	1st Source	2nd Source
Executives	Consultant	Vendor
Middle Managers	Consultant	In-House
Supervisors	In-House	Vendor
Human Resource Staff	In-House	Vendor
Sales Staff	In-House	Vendor/Consultant
Secretarial Staff	In-House	Vendor
Technical Staff	In-House	Vendor/Consultant
Hourly Wage Workers	In-house	Vendor

Importance of Degrees for Presentation Skills Trainers

Not Important (1)
Somewhat Important (2)
Important (3)
Very Important (4)

	N	S	I	V	Mean	SD
BA Communication	31%	22%	24%	23%	**2.4**	1.15
MA Communication	46%	27%	23%	04%	**1.9**	0.91
PhD Communication	71%	20%	07%	02%	**1.4**	0.70

Base: 154

In-House Training Programs

73% of the companies that provide presentation skills training offer all or part of that training on an in-house basis.

Primary Course Objectives*

Improve overall presentation skills	46%
Improve presentation structure & organization	25%
Improve delivery skills	20%
Practice giving a presentation	15%
Understand and use audience analysis	14%
Construct effective visual aids	14%
Reduce nervousness	14%
Handle questions effectively	08%
Develop better sales skills	06%

Base: 87

****Adds to more than 100% due to multiple answers.***

Content Areas of Presentation Skills Training*

Organization techniques	97%
Use of visual aids	92%
Physical delivery	91%
Handling speaking fear	86%
Vocal delivery	85%
Handling questions	85%
Gaining audience attention	84%
Preview of main points	79%
Audience analysis	76%
Establishing common ground	70%
Handling objections	67%
Evidence/supporting material	66%
Establishing credibility	60%
Thesis statements	42%
Theories of communication	35%
Theories of rhetoric (persuasion)	28%

Base: 92

****Adds to more than 100% due to multiple answers.***

74% say that the content of the in-house programs is modified when the course is delivered to different levels of employees.

Changes in the Content for Different Levels of Employees

Level of Employee	Major Changes
Executives & Managers	More press conference practice (7%) More one-on-one training (7%) More video (4%) More on talking to public (1%)
Technical Staff	More on content (3%) More on visuals with numbers (3%)
Sales Staff	Concentration on persuasion (4%)

Base: 69

Types of Aids Used to Deliver Presentation Skills Training*

Video tape	98%
Lectures	89%
Group participation exercises	86%
Material developed in-house	77%
Structured discussions	75%
Role playing	66%
Case studies	28%
Audio tapes	14%
College textbooks	02%

Base: 92

****Adds to more than 100% due to multiple answers.***

Evaluation Attempts of *In-House* Training Programs

89% of in-house presentation skills training programs are evaluated.

Period of Evaluations*

Conclusion of the training	95%
Program development stage	32%
Within six months of the training	28%

Kind of Evaluation Conducted*

Reaction: How well did the participants like the program?	91%
Learning: What principles, facts, and techniques were learned? What attitudes were changed?	70%
Behavior: What changes in job behavior resulted from the program?	52%
Results: What were the tangible results of the program in terms of reduced costs, improved quality, improved quantity, etc?	28%

Base: 82

****Adds to more than 100% due to multiple answers.***

Reviewing Evaluation Reports*

Training Directors	88%
Presentation Skills Trainers	76%
Executives	34%
Middle Managers	30%
Supervisors	20%

How the Results Are Used*

To modify the program	95%
To change the number of times the program is offered	41%
For performance appraisal interviews	16%
To determine training budgets	15%

Base: 82

****Adds to more than 100% due to multiple answers.***